

Latch

By: Progman

Satsuki pulls on the latch, harder now, her fingerprints scraping off at the fringes. The latch stills her; a comforting embrace that affirms, whispers with confidence and kindness that she will find nothing if she looks. 'Ignorance is strength'. Certainty that the only truth she *knows*, the only reality of life that is constant, is that she has hollowed herself. All that she borrows, all that she needs—you cannot conquer all in your presence without sacrificing every piece of yourself.

All for Ryuko, as she discovers. Everything for Ryuko. She hears it, for the ten-thousandth time, this girl, this *upstart*, this delinquent—she has found her. They have found one another, impossibly. The syllables echo within the endless chasm beyond her skin, and it is such a beautiful name.

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Chapter 1

There is a fastener on Satsuki's skin; all garments, all flesh, share this absolute. The primal thread that acts as *her* spine, all spines, the entanglement of form over blood. Buttons on french cuffs. Mundane, sharpened steel on gowns. Buckles on modern fashions restaged as archaic. Cured leather straps stitched to brass.

Silk knots and latches. Oh, so many latches. Pull and tug and *do not yield* to the lock, but it will never move. Resistance is its strength, and it hungers for resolve. Rip the sheer, the lace, the satin; the latch remains, the lock that imprisons none.

Yet it must be shattered like all the others. An empty cage to offer freedom to a prisoner so long forgotten and rotted away. Why idolize Sisyphus, rather than the boulder? Because he has a name, rather than that instrument of torment.

There is a star shower on her sister's heart; the collapse of limitless potential into the gravity of *her* will. Beautiful, but fading quicker than the first *thump* . So invincible, so inexplicably strong and *righteous* from the beginning. And then she isn't. She is human but she is-she is *human*, as all flesh rends when it is unfastened.

Ryuko is human; her heart, brilliant and resplendent, corrupted but *unbound*, proves that.

Ryuko is alive, *grown*, and overflowing with a fury so bright that Satsuki cannot hope to ever exceed or match. Irrational, unlatched, raw with gnashing teeth and screams that invigorate, inspire, and it is all pure. So pure and kind. It is so simple for her.

It could have *always* been that simple, couldn't it?

Satsuki presses her fingers into her own chest-calmer, though. She is *not* their mother, and where there is no need for violence *there will*

be none- into her collarbone, into her heart, deeper, bloodier fingers stained even beyond bone so long ago. She has spilled more than she can possess by magnitudes. And she will keep unlatching, untying, *tearing* apart those who would stand against her. There is no regret; there is only the inevitability of *more*.

Rage and grief, untamed and unquenchable, is all Satsuki knows. All she could fathom from the moment their mother stopped pretending to have a hold on a leash that was never there to begin with. Leave the estate. Become educated, for that is the essence of power.

Understanding how to gain more. Wealth is not enough. A life free of consequence, all necessities provided, all desires exceeded, all boredom entertained, and all anxieties *tranquilized* .

Not enough. She needs more; forever needing more, and more. Her knuckles fracture and her skin crumbles like paper as she consolidates what little she has between world history and mathematics. She is weak, until she is not. Until she has broken herself enough, broken *others* enough, to subjugate from merely a glance.

It is her first taste of true power, and it is what their mother does to her. It is not enough, and it is *revolting* in its foundation. There is no plan. There is no grand scheme; only aimless wrath and dominance for a path that may never reveal itself. With every new tool, every new weapon, every new opportunity, her goal becomes muddier. Inarticulate nonsense out of a toddler's gasping cries.

Satsuki never knew Ryuko's name. Their mother did not *name* her, for she had yet to prove she had a right to exist. To breathe. To be carried. Everything they were both denied; simple, *basic* comforts of life. Does she name her? That nameless vivisected infant? Do what their mother refuses to do? Does not care to do? She cannot, because there is the chance, however insane, that her dead sister would not like the name Satsuki chooses.

So she will not; she will pull harder on the latch, until her wrists, her arms burn, her core, her shoulders, until it *all* burns, until her

ligaments *snap* . The dead do not feel pain, so Satsuki will borrow her sister's theoretical resolve. She borrows more, and more. More qualities she might have had. Her willpower, her determination, her ambition-they *share* these. Potentially, they might have. And for so long, they do. Her strength is her own, but it is *theirs*, just as well.

Satsuki will cultivate even more power, as she searches for some semblance of a direction within the mauled gashes she leaves in her wake. No one remembers her but Satsuki. No one will *ever* know who she might have become, only imagine, so if revenge, if vengeance, as violent, and bloody, and as absolute as she can craft, is the only way to give purpose to her life, to *their* lives, then that is what she will do.

If humanity falls to its knees and begs for salvation, bows to her will, with shrieks of anguish and unrelenting terror, *she will* grant it. But not for them. Not for herself, or them both. The sister she might've had, far more deserving of everything. Of peace, tranquility, love, and *hope* . A life free of the unending nightmare their mother intends to craft out of religious zealotry and inhuman frenzy.

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Victory is absolute. Her will is absolute. Her ambition is absolute. There is no cost too great, no sacrifice too sickening. Take her flesh,

her formless blood, take her name-oh, yes, *please* take her name-and all else. A deal with so many demons, a scheduled appointment. The irony is so sharp, so dense; Satsuki was the one who fell that day, lost, bawling, and scrambling in the dark. Ryuko is uncompromising and uncompromised. She is more perfect than Satsuki dared to *dream* she might have been, because she *is* .

Ryuko is *someone*. Unafflicted by the burdens of leadership and unbreakable resolve. She crafts no image. Her skin is stitched, not latched; she can *be* someone and no one. Whatever she wants, it is within her power. So much is similar, and while violence sadly runs in the family, there is solace in her methods, her mentality. Unlike Satsuki, Ryuko is not cruel. She has a heart, her very own.

There is no hesitation, as Satsuki grasps her own heart, what passes for it, firm like a blazing coal, the blackened smoke filling the maw where all else should be. On the third *thump*, her fingers knot and button to her arteries. There is no fourth. She cannot pull the latch any further without-she is... she is not strong enough. There is nothing left to give. Nothing left to borrow.

Satsuki finds her sister, deposing fate itself, and her sister finds a husk who does not care if she lives or dies so long as she removes their mother's head. One last look into her dying, fading, *mad* eyes as she knows, she *understands* what she has wrought. That giving birth twice was her *greatest* mistake. A reunion almost as bitter and cruel as none would have been; Ryuko does not need her. She does not need a sister.

Ryuko is human and has no need for a flimsy facsimile as a consolation prize. She deserves more; deserves better. More power. More strength. More love, but she cannot give what she has never received. All that Satsuki can offer is what she has borrowed from Ryuko's theoretical counterpart. There is nothing else beyond the embers, still burning, still raging, where her heart should be. Where it has not been for so very long.

All she needs to do is *pull* . Break the final restraint, shatter her ribcage, her sternum, her collarbone, and present her pound of flesh. Every birthday and holiday they missed. Every celebratory event. Every concert. Every athletic victory. Every opening night. Everything they were both denied, compressed into everything *but* a diamond. So, *pull* ; return what you have stolen, and embolden its rightful owner, so that she may-

There is a fifth *thump* ; Satsuki feels it on her fingertips. A sixth. Seven. Eight. Uneven and improperly timed, but her heart *is* beating. There was something fragile there, within the smog. Skittish and surviving within the terror and blood of her youth. It is Ryuko, for that is the only thing that *could* survive. That *did*.

A childish, silly little piece of a fantasy, of a miracle so desperate and pathetic, borne of isolation and... grief, that Satsuki no longer needs. Her prayer, her wish, her pointless, asinine cries of anguish from the garden were ignored and heard.

If Sisyphus has a sister, Satsuki does not care to investigate. There is but *one* boulder. One mountain. One broken latch.